

Year of the Woman Veteran

Monthly Health Messages

March

March is Women's History Month and Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

This month's focus for the Women Veterans is women in history, for Women's History Month. An exhibit at the state capital called, Kentucky Women Remembered , honors contributions from Kentucky women in area of politics, medicine, entertainment, education , sports and military fields. Rosemary Clooney, Loretta Lynn and Martha Layne Collins are a few of the women included in the exhibit.

March is also National Colorectal Cancer Awareness month. Famous women who have died of colorectal cancer include Audrey Hepburn, Farrah Fawcett, and Elizabeth Montgomery. Overall the lifetime risk of developing colorectal cancer is about 1 in 20 (5%). Colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer related deaths in the U.S. when men and women are considered separately but is second leading cause when both sexes are combined. It is expected to cause 49,700 deaths in 2015. The death rate has been falling during the past 20 yrs due to routine screening and removal of polyps in the colon before they develop into cancers.

Lifestyle risk factors that increase your chance of developing colon cancer include a diet high in red meats and processed meats, physical inactivity, Obesity, smoking, and heavy alcohol use.

Other risk factors include increasing age (9 out of 10 people with colorectal cancer are diagnosed are about age 50), ethnic background (African Americans have one of the highest risks along with people of east European Jewish ancestry), personal history of inflammatory bowel disease or IBS , history of colon polyps, and history of Type 2 Diabetes. About 5-10 per cent of people who develop colon cancer have an inherited genetic predisposition.

So, what can you do to decrease your risk of colorectal cancer? As with preventing heart disease, eat a healthy diet high in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Minimize intake of red meats and processed meats. Keep physically active. Maintain healthy weight. Stop smoking.

Most importantly get your colorectal screening starting at age 50 for most people. Colorectal screening that detect polyps and cancer includes: sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy , CT colonography, or barium enema. Tests that screen for cancer include testing for blood, immunochemical substance or DNA in stool . Talk over your risk factors with your medical provider to decide when and what testing is right for you.

February

February is Heart Month

About 300,000 women die each year from heart disease. That is 1 out of every 3-4 female deaths. Despite attempts at educating women, 54% of us still don't recognize heart disease as the Number One Killer of women. Do you know factors that increase your risk for heart disease?

Risk factors that you can avoid include: obesity; poor diet; physical inactivity; alcohol use. Medical conditions can also increase risk for heart disease including, high blood pressure, Diabetes, and increased cholesterol. Finally, genetics can play a role. Tendency for heart disease can run in families. This is increased by unhealthy behaviors alluded to above.

What you can do to decrease your risk :

- 1: Know your B/P and adhere to any medications prescribed ;
- 2: Talk with your Health Care Provider about your diabetes risk, glucose levels and cholesterol levels. Within the VA medications called statins are often prescribed in moderate doses for bad cholesterol (LDL) levels over 100;
- 3: Quit smoking;
- 4: maintain a healthy weight by eating a diet low in saturated fats with plenty of fruits and vegetables;
- 5: EXERCISE: Minimum recommendation: Walk 10min three times daily, five days a wk ;
- 6: limit alcohol use and
- 7: Take steps to reduce stress in your life.

Finally remember that heart attack symptoms in Women are often more subtle than men and we tend to ignore them. Symptoms may be absent and often women describe chest pain as sharp or burning and are more likely to have pain in neck, jaw, throat, abdomen or back.

Robley Rex VA Medical Center at 800 Zorn Ave in Louisville is recognizing Women's Risk for Heart Disease with an Educational Program on February 23, 2015 from 1430-1600 in E005 (West Entrance) . Call Kathy Robbins APRN at 502-287-4811 for more information if interested.

January

January: The Healthy Woman Veteran

More than 4,900 women veterans are getting their health care at the Louisville and Lexington Medical Centers and their outlying clinics. VA health care serves women veterans of all ages, but the average age of women veterans at the Lexington and Louisville VAMCs is 45-50 yrs.

The top five medical problems faced by women veterans served at both Medical Centers are:

1. Hypertension, or high blood pressure;
2. PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), depression and anxiety;
3. Musculoskeletal problems;
4. Diabetes;
5. Hyperlipidemia (High Cholesterol)

My goal in creating health messages for women veterans is to help women be more informed and proactive in their health care. Monthly, starting in February, I will write a message regarding one of the five medical problems. I hope you find the information relevant to you.

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